

Socio-Economic Correlates of Mental Health Problems and its Prevalence among University Students

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This study was carried out to identify the socio-economic correlates of mental health problems and its prevalence among university students. A self-report measure regarding socio-economic status including educational level of parents, parental occupation, family structure and their perceived socio-economic status from the respondents were collected. The prevalence of mental health problems was measured by using DASS-42 (Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale). The collected data was analyzed by using SPSS. The hypothesis of the study proved significant at .001% significant level. Such as, the students with high socio-economic status revealed a mild symptom of stress, anxiety and depression while the severity of stress, anxiety and depression were higher among the students with middle and low socio-economic status. Similarly, the parental education and occupation was also linked with the severity of mental illness among students. The parents with higher qualification showed lower mental problems as compared with those having lower education level. On the other hand, the parents having government job status/self-business revealed lower level of depression as compared with farmers or private job holders. Lastly, the family system also revealed a significant variable as associated with depression and anxiety. The results of this study concluded that symptoms of anxiety and depression were higher in joint family instead of those living in separate family system.

Keywords: Socio-economic status (SES), Stress, Depression, Anxiety, Family System, Parental Occupation, Mental Health Problems.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health abnormalities encompass a wide range of psychotic and neurotic disorders. These abnormalities influence on the overall personality of the individual and ultimately results in a dysfunctional or pathological behavior. Such dysfunctional behaviors are clearly other than the society social norms and values. These behaviors are also called deviant behaviors (Stein, 2013). The clinical terms used for deviant behaviors are stress, anxiety and depression, etc. Stress is defined as an individual's psychological and physiological response to our demands that put pressure to our mental processes such as emotions, thoughts and feelings. Physiological responses of the stress include irregular heartbeat, respiratory problems, upset stomach and trembling. These symptoms of the stress create psychosocial difficulties and have a constant presence in all fields of individual's life to some extent. A normal level of stress is considered as a good or usually regarded as motivator or skills enhancing but the chronic stress can damage our internal organs such as kidney, lungs and can cause brain tumor (Andrews & Wilking, 2004). Stress plays a major role in the onset of depression and anxiety. Depression is one of the common causes of world wide. More than, three million individuals suffer in depression in all over the world. The chief symptoms of depression include the constant feelings of unhappiness, sad mood and sluggishness. The major culprits of depression are loss of job, guilt feelings, helplessness and loneliness. It consists of the different cycles or episodes and during these cycles, the symptoms become worsen which lasts weeks, months or years. It deteriorates the social and interpersonal relationships of the individuals (Roshanak, et al. 2018). The progress and exacerbation of anxiety is also due to continuous and prolonged duration of stress and its symptoms appears with unknown fear

of apprehension and distress among the individuals. Such fear seems to be as a real or imaginary. The core source of the anxiety is the presence of depressed tendency which converted into unconscious fear or panic attacks. The individuals with anxiety reported that they cannot solve the problems, usually remain restless condition (Cohen, Gianaros & Manuck, 2016). Mental health abnormalities made the individuals as miserable and even also made them dysfunctional in order to perform their social and occupational and educational activities (Patel & Kleinman, 2008). Consequently, this dysfunctional social and occupational behavior gives rise to other multiple socio-economic problems such as job failure, financial crises, broken family relationships and academic failure (Ravens & Erhart, 2008). Most of the mental health problems arise due to socio-economic inequalities in our society among the students and these are considered as the major culprit of mental illness. The individuals with low socio-economic status (SES) are usually ignored in a multiple way. They face many stressors such as financial problems, social relationships, unemployment job and academic failure (Weyers, et al. 2010).

One of the worldwide existing factors of mental illness is the low level of socio-economic status (SES). This phenomenon is not only affecting the community but also considered as a hindrance in educational attainment among the students. For example, the students with low level of socio-economic status (SES) could not access to the required educational resources. They cannot participate in social activities as compared with those who are enjoying high level of socio-economic status (SES). Similarly, the students with low socio-economic status (SES) often complaints about psychological and physical anomalies such as stress, anxiety and depression as compared with those of high socio-economic status (Elgar & Pfortner,

2015). Inequalities in social status play a vital role in the increase of mental illness among the individuals. The results of the research proved that the deprived people reported higher level of depression as compared to privileged peoples. The results also concluded that the increase rate of depression was associated with decreasing of social position of the respondent (Sareen, Afifi & Asmundson, 2011). Another study described that the prevalence of depression among university student was due to income inequality, family structure, and the level of parental education (Steptoe, Tanaka & Wardle, 20017).

From ecological viewpoint mental illness is characterized by individual and environmental factors. A study concluded that the individuals belong to low socioeconomic backgrounds reported higher level of mental stress or psychiatric disorders. The results also confirmed that the inequality in social status also linked with stress at regional or individual level (Wang et al. 2015). The effects of social inequalities were also studied by the researchers and concluded that chronic stress as a pathway linked socioeconomic status and mental illness. They revealed that low socioeconomic status is associated with environmental conditions and the individual's social status such as job, income, family and education. Low socioeconomic position of the individual is generally linked with higher psychological distress and impaired health behaviors (Andrew, Garofalo & Yali, 2006).

Socio-economic Related Mental Health Problems of University Students

Socio-economic status and psychological well-being is interlinked. The researchers and the philosophers are agreed that the level of socio-economic status is a predictor of mental health issues like stress, anxiety and depression among the students. The life of university students is very competitive. Thousands of students are studying in the university and they belong to upper, middle- and lower-class families and it is a natural fact that each of one compares himself with the others. The feeling of inferiority complex leads to the mental health issues. Goodwill & Zhou (2020) concluded that socio-economic inequalities lead to many psychological issues one of the most occurring is depression and suicidal behavior among the university students. Another study revealed that a financial risk factor is associated with stress, depression and anxiety among university students. This study concluded that the socio-economic status complex is associated with higher level of depression (Moafatteh, 2021). A study highlighted the risk factors of the mental illness among university students by Islam, Akter & Sikder (2020) concluded that lower income group is more prone to the psychopathological problems as compared to the moderate and high income group. Another study also concluded that the financial factor is linked with mental health or illness (Mboya, John, & Kibopile, 2020).

. It has been observed that the excessive level of stress, anxiety and depression among the university student is due to their lower socio-economic status which ultimately becomes a cause of low academic grades, lack of concentration and other social deviant behaviors (Petter, 2017). Similarly, a research conducted by Miron, Yu & Wilf (2019) identified mental health related problems among students in relation to their existing socio-economic status. They founded that the lower the socio-

economic status the more stress and depression among undergraduate students.

The educationists and policy makers are agreed that the students with low socio-economic status are predispose or more prone to develop stress, anxiety and many mental health issues. The problem under focus is therefore to identify the socio-economic correlates of mental health problems among university students. On the basis of the above this study develops the following research questions and objectives.

1. Is there any impact of socio-economic status on mental health problems among university students?
2. Is there any relationship of parental education, occupation and family structure with mental health problems of university students?
3. To identify the socio-economic status of the university students in relation of their perceived socio-economic status, parental education, parental occupation and family structure.
4. To find out the prevalence of mental health problems among university students in relation of their perceived socioeconomic status, parental education, parental occupation and family structure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of socioeconomic status refers to the people's social class or position in their society which provide meanings to them. Such meanings structure the personality of the peoples in positive or negative manners. The positive perception is healthy and considered as a sign of psychological wellbeing whereas the negative perception is an unhealthy sign of mental illness (Stress, Anxiety and Depression). In this connection, social and economic strategies are considered as one of the important road maps for preventing the mental illness. There is a strong link of social inequalities and mental break down among the adults and adolescents (Adler, Snibbe & Conner, 2003). A rich literature is available to support the connections of mental illness among the individuals with low social status. A study conducted by Lorant, Deliege and Eaton (2003) to find out the prevalence of depression among adults. They concluded a higher level of depression among the adults belonging to low socioeconomic status. Kessler and Neighbors (2006) concluded that the prevalence of severe psychological distress and medical diseases among the population are associated with low socioeconomic status.

It has been observed that the students belongs to less privileged areas are more susceptible to mental illness. The researchers have concluded that there is an association between depression and socio-economic status. The results of their studies proved that the adults belong to low social status reported higher level of depression (Freeman, et al. 2016). A study conducted by Jo, et al. 2011) to find out the relationship of socio demographic variables with depression. By using the people's self-reported level of income, education, occupation and their social class they revealed the positive correlation between their level of social class and the prevalence of depression. Another study highlighted and reported extensive findings about the association of socioeconomic status and the risk of depression as assessed by the collecting the individual's

self-reported perceptions about their level of education, occupation and monthly income. The results showed that the insight of having low social status among adults was associated with depression (Hoebel, Maske & Zeeb, 2017).

The relationship of household monthly income is considered as pivotal for the happiness and prosperity of the family members. It has been observed that the families with low income category report many mental health problems as compared with high income category. A study conducted to check the relationship of family monthly income with the risk of mental illness. The results of the study revealed that the family members with low income reported multiple anxiety and mood related symptoms as compared with high level of income (Reiss, et al. 2019). The effects of household monthly income were also studied by Golberstein (2015). He pointed out that overall wellbeing of the family members were linked with the family income. The result of his study also revealed the association of increase in monthly income with improvement of overall mental health. Gardner and Oswald (2007) pointed out a significant relationship of income and decrease in the symptoms of depression among adults. Patel (2007) highlighted the connections of poverty, parental education, job status in relation with psychological well-being of the individuals. The results revealed that the socio-economic status is a key variable in the onset of mental disorder. The results showed frequent relapse cases among the respondent with low socio-economic status.

Moreover, the role of family system is also considered as a key factor in relation to mental health and illness. Sahar and Muzaffar (2017) studied the role of family system in connection with emotional and behavioral stability. They concluded that the family set up play a vital role in managing the emotions and psychological well-being of the family members. The results of their study showed a healthy relations and low level of stress among the individuals living in joint family system as compared with separate family system. Cheng, et al. (2017) concluded that the role of family is important factor in managing the mental health of the family members. They concluded that the better family functioning is associated with the good mental well-being of their family members.

Furthermore, the parental occupation, education and their perceived socio-economic status considered as a pivotal in predicting the mental health of the family members. Ibrahim, Kelly and Glazebrook (2013). conducted a survey to find out the effects of parents education and occupational status on psychological wellbeing of their family. The results of their study showed a significant relation of parental education on psychological wellbeing of their family.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

One of the most important theoretical frameworks used to address the mental health disparities is Link and Phelan's Theory of Fundamental Causes (1995). The basic feature of this theory is that lower status links with worse health outcomes than those with higher status. From this empirical viewpoint, it was hypothesized that the socio-economic status is correlated with mental health problems and one of the most vital cause of stress, anxiety and depression among the university students. Many

researches utilized this theory to find out the links of socio-economic status with mental illness among general population. A very little is known its relation with student. So it was a theoretical research gap in this area which addressed by this current study.

Hence on the basis of the rich literature in support of the role of socio-economic status and its relationship with mental health problems, the following objectives and hypotheses were generated.

Hypothesis of the Study

- **H1:** Prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression will be higher among the students with low socio-economic status as compared with middle or higher level of socio-economic status.
- **H2:** Prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression will be higher among the students with low level of parental education as compared with higher level of parental education.
- **H3:** Prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression will be higher among the students whose parents belongs to private job status, labor & worker, self-business as compared to those with government job status.
- **H4:** Prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression will be lower among the students living with separate family as compared with joint family system.

Rationale of the Study

The role of socio-economic status in predicting the mental health of the individuals is undeniable. The researchers have proved that the families enjoying high socio-economic status reported good physical and mental health. They concluded that the peoples having low socio-economic status are at higher risk of environmental hazards and mental illness (Freeman, et al. 2016). Up till now, very little has been searched out about the correlates of socio-economic status and its links with mental health or illness. The current study will fill the gap in literature by identifying the socio-economic status of university students and the prevalence of mental health problems among university students. The results of this study will be valuable and will convey a message for mental health policy makers and educationists to design and implement the required interventions and solution to prevent this emerging problem in Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY

It is an acknowledged fact that the happiness of human beings is linked with their social needs. An abundant literature is available that revealed the association of good socio-economic status with the psychological well-beings. Keeping in view the evidences from the literature a following problems statement was generated to carry out this study.

Problem Statement of the Study

Mental health problems are the most common and serious issue facing the students today. Numerous studies on the onset of depression and mental disorders among university students stated the average rate which is approximately 31 % (Ibrahim, Kelly, Adams, & Glazebrook, 2013). This shows that the university students are at increased risk of mental health problems as compared to the general population. Therefore, the current study was carried out to identify the socio-economic

correlates of mental health problems and its prevalence among university students.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were male and female university students belonging from different socio-economic status studying in public sector universities in South Punjab.

Research Design of the Study

A cross-sectional research design was used in this study. Data was collected by using convenient sampling technique. The parental education, occupation, family system and self-reported socio-economic status was taken as a correlates of mental health problems of university students (Stress, Anxiety and Depression).

Measurement of Variables

To measure the variables of the study firstly a self-report measure regarding the socio-economic status was taken from the participants of the study. A self-report measure of socio-economic status included the educational level of parents, parental occupation, family structure and their perceived socio-economic status. Secondly, to measure the mental health problems of the student's depression, anxiety and stress scale (DASS-42) was administered to identify the mental health related problems of the university students.

Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-42)

This scale was adopted as used in the previous researches. This scale was developed by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995) or adopted and translated by Hussain & Gulzar (2020). This scale is free to use however, permission was taken from the Hussain & Gulzar (2020) to use the Urdu version scale in this current study. This scale consists of 42 self-reported items. Cronbach Internal Consistency of this scale is 0.89. The total item correlation is calculated from 0.51 to 0.75. The test-retest and split-half reliability is 0.99 and 0.96 accordingly.

Results and Discussion

H1: Prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression will be higher among the students with low level of perceived socio-economic status as compared with middle or higher level of socio-economic status.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Socio economic status	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Depression	Lower Class	241	20.54	7.14
	Middle Class	263	20.37	6.77
	Upper Class	96	17.42	8.42
	Total	600	19.97	7.28
Anxiety	Lower Class	241	18.45	7.76
	Middle Class	263	18.60	7.67
	Upper Class	96	15.83	9.80
	Total	600	18.10	8.13
Stress	Lower Class	241	21.98	7.19
	Middle Class	263	21.50	7.26
	Upper Class	96	18.11	8.66
	Total	600	21.15	7.58

The lower level of stress, anxiety and depression observed in respondents belong to upper economic class while the higher level observed in lower and middle class

Table 2: Analysis of Variances

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Depression	Between Groups	745.83	2	372.92	7.18	.001**
	Within Groups	31008.43	597	51.94		
	Total	31754.26	599			

Anxiety	Between Groups	589.39	2	294.69	4.51	.011*
	Within Groups	38973.81	597	65.28		
	Total	39563.20	599			
Stress	Between Groups	1083.77	2	541.89	9.70	.000**
	Within Groups	33349.42	597	55.86		
	Total	34433.20	599			

Analysis of variances revealed higher level of stress, anxiety and depression among lower and middle socio-economic class respondents and lower among higher socio-economic class respondents at significance level of .001%

H2: Prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression will be higher among the students with low level of parental education as compared with higher level of parental education.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics (Father's Education)

Father's Education	N	Depression		Anxiety		Stress	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Under Matric	57	20.02	9.40	17.44	9.33	21.81	9.06
Matriculation	136	19.83	7.25	17.82	8.66	20.55	8.11
Intermediate	116	21.49	5.97	19.17	6.80	21.59	6.38
Graduation	140	20.51	6.76	19.09	7.64	21.69	7.45
Masters	102	18.99	7.41	17.47	8.14	21.50	7.26
M.Phil	32	15.75	7.09	14.59	8.59	18.34	7.91
PhD	11	19.91	9.18	15.91	8.35	19.55	7.51
MBBS	6	19.50	8.02	20.33	11.09	19.50	7.63

A comparison of respondents in relation of their father educational status. In case of anxiety and depression average score of respondents whose father's education is graduation, masters, M.Phil and PhD lower level of depression as compared to respondents with low level education like Matric, or intermediate.

Table 4: Analysis of Variances

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Depression	Between Groups	980.79	7	140.11	2.69	.009**
	Within Groups	30773.47	592	51.98		
	Total	31754.26	599			
Anxiety	Between Groups	821.86	7	117.41	1.79	.086
	Within Groups	38741.34	592	65.44		
	Total	39563.20	599			
Stress	Between Groups	445.80	7	63.69	1.11	.355
	Within Groups	33987.39	592	57.41		
	Total	34433.20	599			

ANOVA test showing F-score 2.69 with p-value 0.009 showing significant at 1% level. For anxiety average score of respondents whose fathers education graduation, masters, M.Phil and PhD lower level of depression as compared to respondents with low level education like Matric, or Intermediate. ANOVA test showing F-score 1.79 with p-value 0.086 showing not significant. For stress average score of respondents whose fathers education graduation, masters, M.Phil and PhD lower level of depression as compared to respondents with low level education like Matric, or Intermediate.

H3: Prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression will be higher among the students whose parents belongs to private job status, labor & worker and self-business as compared to those with government job status.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics (Father Occupation)

Father's Occupation	N	Depression		Anxiety		Stress	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Government Job	181	18.98	7.37	16.48	7.82	20.96	8.12
Own Business	128	19.20	7.45	17.36	8.89	19.88	8.11
Private Job	130	22.12	5.99	21.98	6.58	23.50	5.48
Labor & Workers	32	20.16	8.17	19.53	9.47	20.09	8.35

The table showing the comparison of overall respondents according to their father's occupation. In case of depression the

average score of respondents whose father have private job status and labor and workers have higher level of depression as compared to respondents with government job and having own business

Table 6: Analysis of Variances

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Depression	Between Groups	858.13	4	214.53	4.13	.003**
	Within Groups	30896.14	595	51.93		
	Total	31754.26	599			
Anxiety	Between Groups	2770.07	4	692.52	11.20	.000**
	Within Groups	36793.13	595	61.84		
	Total	39563.20	599			
Stress	Between Groups	1008.46	4	252.11	4.49	.001**
	Within Groups	33424.74	595	56.18		
	Total	34433.20	599			

ANOVA test showing F-score 4.13 with p-value 0.003 showing significant at 1% level. For anxiety the average score of respondents whose father have private job, labor and workers have higher level of anxiety as compared to respondents with government job and having own business. ANOVA test showing F-score 11.20 with p-value 0.000 showing significant at 1% level. For stress the average score of respondents whose fathers have their own business having lowest level of stress as compared to all others ANOVA test showing F-score 4.49 with p-value 0.001 showing significant at 1% level.

H4: Prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression will be lower among the students living with separate family as compared with joint family system.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics (Family System)

	Family System	N	Mean	SD	T	Significance
Depression	Joint Family	309	20.24	7.65	0.96	0.336
	Separate Family	291	19.67	6.86		
Anxiety	Joint Family	309	19.10	8.00	3.14	0.002**
	Separate Family	291	17.03	8.14		
Stress	Joint Family	309	21.50	7.45	1.18	0.240
	Separate Family	291	20.78	7.71		

Results showing that level of depression, Anxiety and Stress high in joint family system as compared to separate family system. Results are significant for anxiety.

Table 8: Identification of socio-economic status of university students in South Punjab in relation to their (SES, Family system, Father's occupation, Parental education).

Variables	Classes	N	Percentage
Family System	Joint Family	309	51.5
	Separate Family	291	48.5
Socio Economic Status	Lower Class	241	40.17
	Middle Class	263	43.83
	Upper Class	96	16
Father's Education	Under Matric	57	9.5
	Matriculation	136	22.67
	Intermediate	116	19.33
	Graduation	140	23.33
	Masters	102	17
	M.Phil	32	5.33
	PhD	11	1.83
	MBBS	6	1
Father's Occupation	Government Job	181	30.17
	Farmer & Landlords	129	21.5
	Own Business	128	21.33
	Private Job	130	21.67
	Labor & Workers	32	5.33

The above table shows the level of socio-economic status of university students

Findings of the Study

The current study has identified that the students' level of socio-economic status, their parental occupation, education and the

family system contribute in predicting their level of psychological well-being. The first hypothesis of the study showed significant results and revealed that the respondents with higher level of socio-economic status showed low level of stress, anxiety and depression while the respondents with middle and lower level of socio-economic status showed higher level of psychopathology. The results of this hypothesis are in line with the previous researches conducted in the past. Such as, Perveen, et al. (2020) explored the relationship of depression among the students with low socio-economic status and pointed out higher level of depression among those with low social status. The second and third hypotheses of the study pointed out the significant links of the level of anxiety and depression among those whose parents were low in their educational and occupation. The results of the current study are in connection with the literature. A similar study conducted by the Zaki (2012) to check the relationship of parental occupation and education with stress and anxiety among the students and proved a positive association. The fourth and the last hypothesis of the study proved a significant results and showed high level of mental strains among the students living in combined family system the results of Barrett and Turner (2005) revealed the similar findings as the current study revealed.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the socio-economic variables proved as a crucial variable in relation to mental health or illness among the university students. The overall results of the study showed a significant links of socio-economic variables with the mental illness among students. Hence, there is a need to improve the psychosocial, environmental, and economic livings of the students in order to calm the psychopathological symptoms among university students.

Discussion and Implication

The findings from the collected data revealed a higher level of stress, anxiety and depression among the university students belongs to lower socio-economic status and lower parental education level. The results of this study are consistent with the past studies. Such as Ahmad, Negash & Kerebih (2020) concluded that the students with low income or parental education level were more predispose or vulnerable to mental illness as compared to those with higher income group. Based on the findings of this study it is a message for the educationists, policy makers and the administrative bodies of the universities to design mental health promotion and prevention strategies for the prevention of the new incidences of stress, anxiety and depression among university students.

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